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SUBJECT: NIGER DELTA: CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT IN WARRI

REF: A. LAGOS 1204
B. 2003 LAGOS 2535

Classified By: Joseph Gregoire for reasons 1.4 (b), (d), and (e).

¶11. (C) Introduction and summary. This is the second in a series of four cables addressing the security, political, and humanitarian situations in the Niger Delta, based on a field visit by Poloff and Econoff to Warri June 7 and 8. This cable addresses the recent cease-fire agreement and the Ijaw and Itsekiri ethnic groups' political demands. Now that they have brokered a cease-fire, the youth leaders are moving toward the goal of healing and eventually transformation of the conflict to final resolution. Continued USG involvement in the area, more robust funding of USG-funded non-governmental organizations (NGO) involved in the peace talks, and increased humanitarian assistance might go a long way toward enabling a more stable environment for peaceful resolution of the conflict. End introduction and summary.

CEASE-FIRE AGREEMENT

¶12. (U) In early May 2004 Ijaw and Itsekiri "youths" formed the Warri Itsekiri/Ijaw Grassroots Peace Front (WIIGPF) and declared a cease-fire on June 1 with respect to fighting that broke out in March 2003. The agreement begins with a quote by Abraham Lincoln: "My greatest concern is not whether you have failed, but whether you are content with failure." The quote reflects the tone of the document and possibly the mood of the Ijaw and Itsekiri youths who wrote it. They now seem to have grown tired of the conflict and its effect on their society. The youth leaders claim to recognize that through their actions they have "depleted human and natural resources, relentlessly scared away investments, recklessly rendered our people homeless, and have ushered in a period of unrest characterized by a rise in crime..."

¶13. (U) In their June 1 agreement, the Ijaw and Itsekiri youth leaders referred to the April 23 attack on a Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) contracting group that resulted in the death of five people including two AMCITS (ref A), and called on their communities to assist Joint Task Force (JTF) Operation Restore Hope in apprehending the perpetrators. The youths asserted that the "people at the grassroots" are the only ones who can resolve the political differences, and stated they have created a "mechanism" to address these "differences and restore enduring peace." They also explicitly warned "any persons or groups engaged in unlawful activities that times have changed and that the rules are clear." Regardless of ethnicity, they affirmed, "the law will take its due course." They concluded the document by giving credit to Delta State Governor James Ibori and JTF Commander BG Elias Zamani for facilitating the agreement, and renewed WIIGF's resolve to enforce it.

BEHIND THE SCENES: YOUTHS AND ELDERS

¶14. (C) The term "youths" in the Niger Delta and African context can be misleading. The youths are middle-aged men who are leaders of their communities. They are young only in comparison to the elders, the traditional rulers and leaders who are a generation or two older. This socio-cultural distinction has influenced handling of the conflict. Traditionally, the Ijaw and Itsekiri elders acted as brokers for their tribes. As a group, the elders have tended to focus on perceived wrongs dating to the beginning of the colonial era in 1890 and have exercised limited control over the militant youths. As the recent conflict raged, the youth leaders involved in the ethnic fighting, illegal oil bunkering, and attacks on oil installations began to dissociate themselves from the elders. The youth leaders now hold sway over their own constituents and appear to be bringing the elders into the fold, out of cultural respect and political necessity. Various sources have told us that the elders have been effectively cut out of decision making, however, which facilitated reaching the cease-fire agreement.

15. (C) Sam Ken (protect), a militant Ijaw youth leader and key architect of the cease-fire agreement, told Conoffs that the elders are no longer a factor in negotiations. He asserted that the JTF and Delta State Government recognize this fact and now work directly with the youths. Zamani (protect) confirmed Ken's assertions that the JTF now deals only with the youth leaders. He said bypassing the elders facilitated the cease-fire, but in recognition of their cultural status he will "pay attention" to them and bring them along if need be. One Ijaw chief has voiced displeasure with the agreement, but Zamani is confident that he can bring him around whereas Ken said he has no choice but to abide by the agreement. Daniel Reyenieu, a militant Itsekiri youth leader and co-author of the agreement, told Conoffs that the Itsekiri elders were also out of the loop.

CEASE-FIRE IMPLEMENTATION

16. (C) As stated in the cease-fire agreement, the rules have changed and anyone not abiding by the agreement will be "brought to book." Some criminal militant youth leaders who failed to abide by the agreement were killed recently (ref A). The Ijaw and Itsekiri youth leaders who have endorsed the agreement have gotten public opinion behind the cease-fire. Through the auspices of the U.S.-based International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH), Ijaw and Itsekiri leaders have gone into the creeks with IFESH officials to publicize the agreement and bring their constituents along in the political process. Zamani told us their initiative has been well received.

17. (U) Numerous Ijaw and Itsekiri youth told Conoffs that the NGOs, the Delta State Government, and the JTF peace initiatives have been well received and continue to have a positive impact on moves to resolve the conflict. Two NGO peace initiatives funded by the USG and focused on conflict resolution provide a forum for Ijaw and Itsekiri youths and elders to discuss their views. IFESH's peace dialogue has evoked the most favorable response from participants. IFESH has also implemented USG- and ChevronTexaco-funded humanitarian aid and sustainable development projects in the region. Academic Associates Peace Works (AAPW) also receives funding from USAID and DRL (ref B). AAPW's Warri Peace Forum was the first of its kind in the region and is credited by many people for having created an atmosphere of open dialogue. The impact of these USG-funded NGO and GON peace initiatives is clear. Of the six youth leaders who signed the June 1 cease-fire agreement, one leader participated in all four peace initiatives, two leaders in three of them, and three in two of the initiatives.

POLITICAL DEMANDS

18. (C) Although a cease-fire has been agreed, addressing the political and economic grievances (septel) of the Ijaw and Itsekiri that fuel conflict is a bigger hurdle. The core Ijaw grievance is the perceived political disenfranchisement in the Warri Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Warri South, Warri Southwest, and Warri North. Ken said the Ijaw are mainly concerned with Warri Southwest and North. (Warri South is predominantly Itsekiri and partly inhabited by many Itsekiri villagers who fled their homes along the Benin River as a result of recent conflict.) Ken said the Ijaw could accept an agreement with the Delta State Government to create additional wards within the LGAs. He said the Ijaw could accept having fewer wards in Warri North, but insisted that Warri Southwest be re-organized so that each ethnic group had ten wards where the Ijaw perceive themselves to be more populous. Ken insisted that under this arrangement, the chairmanships of Warri North and Warri Southwest would rotate between the Ijaw and Itsekiri at each election cycle. When asked by Conoffs if such a practice would be democratic, Ken said there were no "free and fair" elections in Nigeria, making the point moot. Rotation would be agreed upon at the primaries since both ethnic groups are predominantly represented by the ruling People's Democratic Party. If the Ijaw could do what they want, Ken said they would carve an additional LGA out of each of the two contested LGAs dominated by the Ijaw. But the gerrymandered creation of new LGAs can be done only by the federal government, whereas wards can be created by state governments.

19. (C/NF) Besides creating new wards and gerrymandering LGAs, Ken wants development committees instituted in each LGA. Ken proposes that such committees receive forty percent of the LGA share of the federation account, which is largely derived from oil revenues. The committees would use the revenue to develop the Warri LGAs, which, Ken said, have been grossly neglected by the Delta State Government and the GON. When asked how he might persuade the GON to agree to these

demands, Ken replied that if the GON did not comply, he could create a situation such that the GON would be required to declare a state of emergency, as it did recently in Plateau State.

¶10. (C) Reyenieju, an Itsekiri militant youth leader and co-author of the cease-fire agreement, was more pragmatic in stating Itsekiri demands to Conoffs. He said there is a continued need to restore and reinforce the rule of law and to reaffirm the GON's responsibility to maintain security in the region. Aware of competing Ijaw political demands, Reyenieju did not express support for the creation of LGAs or wards. Instead, he called for elections reflecting the combined will of the people, and said he would accept the results, pointing out that the Ijaw had boycotted the last federal election and had not registered to vote. He said nothing about development committees or the federation account, but underscored the need for the Itsekiri internally displaced persons to return to their homes and for donors to address the economic plight of the region (septel).

¶11. (C/NF) COMMENT. The USG-funded peace initiatives and the \$50,000 in humanitarian aid provided shortly after the beginning of the conflict last year have created much goodwill toward the USG among the youth leaders and area residents. However, both the Ijaw and Itsekiri have an exaggerated sense of USG influence on the GON, as was evident from their plea to Conoffs that the USG press the GON into action. Now, the cease-fire agreement appears to be in effect and to be receiving broad support. The youth leaders, especially the Ijaw, have shown they have the political will and means to ensure others keep in tow (ref A). Both the Ijaw and Itsekiri leaders seem to be looking at the conflict comprehensively, and are implementing principles of conflict resolution to cope with it. Now that they have brokered a cease-fire, the youth leaders, particularly with the aid of IFESH, are moving toward the goal of healing and eventually toward transformation of the conflict to its final resolution. Continued USG involvement in the area, more robust funding of IFESH and AAPW, and increased humanitarian assistance (septel) might go a long way toward enabling a more stable environment for peaceful resolution of the conflict. END COMMENT.

HINSON-JONES